United Nations S/PV.6775

# Security Council

Sixty-seventh year

Provisional

**6775th meeting**
Tuesday, 29 May 2012, 10 a.m.
New York

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| *President:* | Mr. Mehdiyev | (Azerbaijan) |
| *Members:* | China | Mr. Wang Min |
| | Colombia | Mr. Alzate |
| | France | Mr. Briens |
| | Germany | Mr. Wittig |
| | Guatemala | Mr. Briz Gutiérrez |
| | India | Mr. Kumar |
| | Morocco | Mr. Kadiri |
| | Pakistan | Mr. Tarar |
| | Portugal | Mr. Moraes Cabral |
| | Russian Federation | Mr. Churkin |
| | South Africa | Mr. Sangqu |
| | Togo | Mr. Menan |
| | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | Sir Mark Lyall Grant |
| | United States of America | Mrs. DiCarlo |

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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12-35233 (E)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

**Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

**The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question**

**The President**: Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Serry.

**Mr. Serry**: The past month has been characterized by several challenging events that have the potential to destabilize the situation on the ground. Yet each has been overcome for now, and we are possibly moving in a more positive direction.

Following the Quartet meeting of 11 April, the parties exchanged letters in which they outlined their respective requirements for direct talks to continue. The Palestinians delivered a letter on 17 April and the Israelis responded on 12 May. The exchange was kept confidential and led to quiet direct engagement, with limited international involvement, which should be welcomed and encouraged. The Quartet envoys will further engage with both sides to encourage them to seize this opportunity to take mutually reinforcing confidence-building measures that support a continuation of their quiet engagement.

In parallel, however, a series of developments threatened to inflame tensions. The hunger strike by more than 1,500 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli custody, which started on 17 April to protest prisoner conditions and the application of administrative detentions, was resolved on 14 May. We are pleased that Israel has taken steps to address the concerns of prisoners related to the use of solitary confinement, family visits and the practice of administrative detention, which should be used only in the most limited number of cases and for as short a period as possible. We understand that Israel is also to deliver the remains of 100 Palestinians buried in Israeli-controlled areas.

The agreement reflects the positive impact of the quiet direct engagement between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. The Secretary-General and I have been engaged from the beginning and indicated our concern for the health of the prisoners. We welcome the foresight of both parties that enabled them to reach the agreement, which we hope will continue to be implemented in full. We also commend the important role played by Egypt in brokering the deal. However, we are still concerned by reports about a few prisoners continuing their hunger strike, one of them in critical condition, and hope for a speedy resolution of those cases as well.

The prisoner agreement was reached on the eve of 15 May, the day the Palestinians commemorate as the beginning of the refugee experience, which last year resulted in considerable violence and loss of life. Instead, the events of the day were relatively contained, with Palestinian and Israeli security forces heavily deployed to prevent confrontation. The Lebanese Armed Forces were also prepared to prevent demonstrations from approaching the Blue Line. Clashes did occur, however, between Palestinian protesters and Israeli forces, resulting in injuries, mostly at checkpoints around Jerusalem.

Some clashes and arrests also took place in East Jerusalem on 20 May, on what the Israeli Government regards as Jerusalem Day, marking what Israel considers to be the unification of occupied East Jerusalem. Israeli police arrested 10 Israeli demonstrators, as well as five Palestinians. A Palestinian man was also seriously injured after allegedly attempting to stab an Israeli soldier near the Gush Etzion junction, south of Bethlehem. On 15 and 20 May, the two sides acted in a way that averted an escalation of tensions.

Simultaneously, significant internal political changes occurred. On the Israeli side, Prime Minister Netanyahu struck a deal with the opposition Kadima Party to join his coalition Government on 8 May. The new governing coalition now includes 94 of the 120 members of the Knesset. Prime Minister Netanyahu has stated that the new coalition allows him to promote a "responsible peace process." The Secretary-General sees this as a new opportunity for the Government of Israel to embark on a meaningful renewal of the peace process with vision and determination and in the aim of resolving all final status issues and realizing the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security, resulting in the long overdue establishment of the Palestinian State.

On the Palestinian side, President Abbas reshuffled the Cabinet and on 16 May swore in Prime Minister Fayyad and 24 ministers. He immediately tasked them with implementing his decree calling for long overdue municipal elections. The Presidential decree establishing the Government, as well as the Prime Minister's letter of acceptance, made clear that the new Cabinet did not prejudge the outcome of ongoing efforts at Palestinian reconciliation.

Four days later, on 20 May, Palestinian leaders announced a new formula for progress on reconciliation achieved with the assistance of Egyptian mediation. As part of the agreement and as we speak, the Palestinian Central Election Commission is in Gaza to ascertain whether it will be enabled to update the voter registration lists in Gaza, which is expected to take six to eight weeks. On 28 May, the head of the Election Commission met with senior Hamas leaders in Gaza and announced that the Committee will resume its operations in three days. We expect the de facto authorities to extend their full cooperation to enable voter registration in Gaza. We understand that a 10-day period is expected to start simultaneously for the formation of a new transitional technocratic Government for the duration of six months. A transitional Government, once established, will then prepare for general elections and focus on the reconstruction of Gaza.

Progress on reconciliation remains a fundamental aspect of peace, as a unified Palestinian polity is central to realizing a two-State solution. On 11 April, while reaffirming its previous positions, the Quartet also underscored that the situation in and around Gaza would remain fragile and unsustainable as long as the West Bank and Gaza are not reunited under the legitimate Palestinian Authority adhering to the commitments undertaken by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Bearing in mind resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009), the Secretary-General has continually supported efforts for Palestinian unity and the work of Egypt in this regard. The Secretary-General wishes to see unity in the framework of the positions of the Quartet and the commitments of the PLO and the Arab Peace Initiative. As he reiterated in his phone call with President Abbas after the Doha Declaration was adopted in February, peace talks and reconciliation are not mutually exclusive. Progress in one must not undermine the other.

During the reporting period, settlement activity continued. On 24 April, the Government of Israel announced the intention to retroactively legalize three settlement outposts in the West Bank towns of Sansana, Bruchin and Rechalim. On 30 April, Jerusalem City Hall submitted plans to the Jerusalem Planning and Building Committee for an additional 1,200 hotel rooms in Givat Hamatos in East Jerusalem. On 10 May, plans for the construction of 1,242 units in the Gilo neighbourhood of East Jerusalem were announced, extending Gilo into surrounding Palestinian areas. These actions are contrary to international law and Israel's commitments under the Road Map, and should stop. Demolitions also continued during the reporting period, albeit at a slower rate.

Clashes between Israeli settlers and Palestinians have also continued in the West Bank. Settler attacks resulted in 11 Palestinians, including four children, being injured. On 19 and 26 May, two Palestinians from different villages were reportedly injured by live fire from inhabitants of Yitzhar settlement, south of Nablus. Settler attacks on Palestinian property, including agricultural land, resulted in over 1,300 trees being damaged. Palestinian attacks on Israelis in the West Bank, mostly consisting of stone throwing at Israeli vehicles, also continued during the reporting period and resulted in one Israeli injury. On 20 May, Israeli security forces announced the arrest of Palestinians attempting to kidnap Israelis in the West Bank in order to negotiate the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

During the reporting period, citing security concerns, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conducted 306 operations in the West Bank, during which 725 Palestinians were injured, including 44 children, while 284 Palestinians were arrested. Nine IDF soldiers were injured by Palestinians. The bulk of injuries and detentions occurred during daily Palestinian demonstrations in support of Palestinian prisoners on hunger strike in Israeli jails until the prisoner agreement was reached on 14 May. On 20 May, an Israeli military court convicted Bassem Tamimi on charges of taking part in illegal demonstrations and soliciting protesters to throw stones. These charges related to demonstrations against the barrier, which deviates from the Green Line in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. I take this opportunity to reiterate that the right of peaceful protest must be upheld and that all protests should be kept strictly non-violent.

Palestinian security forces continued work to maintain law and order in the West Bank within the framework of Palestinian Authority obligations under the first phase of the Road Map. On 27 April, Palestinian security forces safely dismantled two unexploded devices near Jenin. On 5 and 6 May, Palestinian forces conducted a large security operation in Jenin to restore order, and arrested some 60 suspects following shots fired against the residence of the Governor on 2 May and his death from a heart attack the next day. To carry out their important mission in an effective manner, Palestinian security forces must be adequately equipped, including by maintaining an appropriate type and amount of weapons and ammunition under their control.

Further to our expressed concern regarding transparent enforcement of the law, on 29 April the Palestinian Attorney General confirmed that, for several months and upon his instruction, the main Palestinian Internet providers prevented clients from accessing some Palestinian news websites. On 5 May, President Abbas formally reversed this order and gave public assurances that freedom of opinion and expression are natural rights enshrined in the Palestinian Basic Law.

In Gaza, a relative calm prevailed during the reporting period. A total of 11 rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel, while Israel Defense Forces conducted seven incursions and two airstrikes into Gaza, resulting in the injury of 10 Palestinian civilians. Six Palestinians were killed and six were injured in tunnel-related activities. We condemn indiscriminate rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel and continue to call for their complete cessation. We also urge Israel to show maximum restraint.

On 13 May, a Gaza court rejected an appeal against the death penalty for a Palestinian convicted of murder in April 2011, bringing the number of death sentences confirmed in Gaza this year to five. The sentence has not been approved by President Abbas, as required by the Palestinian Basic Law. We call on Hamas to reconsider its position, exhibit respect for the international community's firm rejection of the death penalty, and abolish its use in Gaza.

Reconstruction and economic growth in the Gaza Strip remain fundamental objectives of the United Nations. The total value of approved United Nations works in the Gaza Strip involving potential dual-use materials that require Israel's approval now exceeds $365 million, with $96 million-worth of projects still under Israeli review. This means that United Nations agencies are now enabled to play a major role in international efforts for priority recovery and reconstruction in Gaza.

Much more needs to be done, however. The United Nations continues to urge Israel to allow the unrestricted import of key building materials and particularly aggregate, iron bar and cement — the "ABC" of Gaza reconstruction — which are now also substantially and illegally imported through tunnels with Egypt. In the absence of such a change, it will be important to maintain a flow of approvals for further reconstruction works in the Gaza Strip.

Gaza's recovery and long-term economic growth remain a fundamental objective of the United Nations. Transfers to the West Bank and exports to Israel are essential in this regard. The recent export of a truckload of shirts to the United Kingdom represents an important broadening of the type of goods being exported from the Gaza Strip. As of 19 May, a total of 150 truckloads of goods have been exported from the Gaza Strip this year. This is a positive step, and I hope that exports from Gaza will continue to grow.

Gaza continues to suffer from a shortage of electricity. While the situation has improved slightly since the last briefing (see S/PV.6742), further improvements are required to ensure that the energy supply is both sufficient and reliable. The United Nations remains engaged on this issue, including through the replacement of four destroyed transformers, a measure that will enhance the ability of the Gaza power plant to feed the electricity grid.

In Lebanon, the situation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon area of operations has remained generally quiet. On 30 April, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) commenced work on a wall to replace the existing technical fence south of the Blue Line in the sensitive area of Kafr Kela, as agreed by the parties. Air violations by the IDF continued on an almost daily basis.

The general situation in Lebanon has been volatile over the past month. Despite the Government's efforts to maintain its policy of disassociation from the situation in Syria, a number of incidents have heightened concerns over the impact of the Syrian crisis.

The security situation in the northern town of Tripoli remains of concern following the clashes that erupted on

12 May between the predominantly Sunni and Allawite neighbourhoods of Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jebel Mohsen. The fighting continued for several days and left at least 10 people dead and several dozen injured.

On 20 May, two Sunni sheikhs were killed by Lebanese Armed Forces soldiers at a checkpoint in the northern Akkar region. The incident prompted protests throughout the country. Clashes also erupted between different Sunni groups in a Beirut neighbourhood in which at least two people died and several were injured. Two days later, as news spread of the abduction in Syria of Lebanese pilgrims returning from Iran, protests also began in the southern suburbs of Beirut. Leaders from across the political spectrum appealed for calm and engaged in efforts to secure the release of the hostages. Although reports indicated that they were being set free and returned to Lebanon on 25 May, efforts remain under way at present to ensure their release.

Against that backdrop, there has been some momentum towards a resumption of national dialogue in Lebanon. President Sleiman has indicated that he intends to reconvene political leaders for a renewed dialogue early next month, which Speaker Berri, Prime Minister Mikati and others have welcomed. The initiative also has the active support of Saudi King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. In addition, throughout the past two weeks, the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Derek Plumbly, has been in continuous contact with leaders across the political spectrum, encouraging dialogue and restraint.

More than 26,000 Syrian refugees currently receive assistance in Lebanon. The United Nations continues to coordinate closely with the Government of Lebanon on the provision of assistance to those refugees.

The violence and continued killing in Syria continue to be of extreme concern to the Secretary-General, and the peaceful resolution of the crisis is a priority focus for the United Nations as a whole. The Council has been extensively briefed in the past few days, through two letters of the Secretary-General on 25 and 27 May and a briefing by Under-Secretary-General Ladsous and General Mood regarding the horrific events in Al-Houla. I will therefore not address the situation in Syria in my remarks today. Deputy Joint Special Envoy Guéhenno and Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Ladsous will brief the Council again tomorrow and provide further details on the latest developments and on our efforts.

In conclusion, in this briefing I have drawn the attention of the Council to a few positive trends that, if sustained, will offer renewed hope for progress. On the ground, the situation could have worsened, and the parties' concerted efforts to avert this are encouraging. The quiet, direct engagement within the framework of the exchange of letters is positive as well. The outcome of recent reconciliation efforts, on which I have reported, is still uncertain, but in the end there can be no two-State solution without Palestinian unity being restored consistent with that goal. The parties must now also be willing to take the much-needed steps to capitalize on the potential for progress. This is important, because while the potential for progress exists, the situation remains fragile and uncertain.

From my vantage point in Jerusalem, where I closely follow events on the ground and in the region, I disagree with those who argue that the significant change and uncertainty in the region brought about by the Arab awakening means that this is not the time for progress. On the contrary, the search for a lasting peace that ends the Arab-Israeli conflict and resolves all claims is, in my view, more urgent than ever, because after almost 20 years of failed peacemaking the very viability of a two-State solution is at stake. If the parties do not grasp the current opportunity, they should realize that the implication is not merely the slowing of progress towards a two-State solution. Instead, we could be moving down a path towards a one-State reality, which would also move us further away from regional peace in the spirit of the Arab Peace Initiative.

I sincerely hope that the parties will find a way forward in the coming months, and I pledge the continued commitment of the United Nations to work for a comprehensive resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of Security Council resolutions; the Madrid principles, including land for peace; the road map; and the agreements previously reached between the parties.

**The President**: I thank Mr. Serry for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

*The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.*